

RECYCLING COMPANY AGREES TO QUIT POLLUTING

Atlanta-based SP Newsprint, one of the largest newspaper recycling companies in the South, agreed Aug. 5 to install new equipment at its Dublin, Ga., plant to reduce the amount of plastic it was discharging into the Oconee River. The company allegedly released more than a ton of plastic each year into the river, according to Justine Thompson, an attorney with the Georgia Center for Law in the Public Interest, which negotiated the agreement.

SP Newsprint is owned by a partnership of media companies, including Cox Enterprises, owner of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*; Knight Ridder, owner of the *Columbus Ledger-*



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Plastic floating in the Oconee

Enquirer and the *Macon Telegraph*; and Media General, which publishes the *Tampa Tribune*.

The company recycles used newspapers dropped in more than 7,000 recycling bins in 10 states. But plastic placed in the newspaper receptacles was being shredded along with the paper — and ended up in the Oconee River.

Fishermen spotted the plastic last summer and notified the state Environmental Protection Division and the Altamaha Riverkeeper.

Last August, the Altamaha Riverkeeper and Georgia Center for Law in the Public Interest notified SP Newsprint that they intended to sue. “Obviously, you can’t just discharge pieces of plastic into water of the state and expect that to be acceptable,” says Altamaha Riverkeeper Executive Director Deborah Sheppard.

Negotiations stalled until last winter, the night before attorney Thompson was set to file a lawsuit against SP Newsprint. It took more than six months to hammer out the agreement.

SP Newsprint plans to install new equipment to reduce plastic pollution, and start a public education campaign to teach recyclers about the hazards of putting plastic into newspaper bins, according to the agreement. The company will also test the Oconee’s water quality for two years and report its findings to the Altamaha Riverkeeper.

SP Newsprint officials didn’t return phone calls by press time.

—MICHAEL WALL